DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 288 356 FL 016 995

AUTHOR Castilleja, Janet
TITLE On the Writing of Bilingual Students.
PUB DATE [87]
NOTE 37p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Affective Behavior; Bilingualism; *Bilingual Students; Dialects; *Disadvantaged; English for Academic Purposes; Ethnic Bias; *Ethnic Groups; Group Membership; High Schools; Language Attitudes; Self Esteem; *Spanish Speaking; Stereotypes; Teacher Attitudes; *Writing (Composition); *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

The writing problems of most Spanish-English bilinguals do not stem from their bilingualism per se, but are similar to those that inhibit other basic writers. The most serious is unfamiliarity with written, academic English. Students can rarely overcome this on their own. Most need intensive remedial and developmental instruction to be adequately prepared for college work. Hispanic students also share some problems with other poor, minority, nonmainstream students, including identification with a subculture that does not value traditional educational goals. These problems are compounded by the low self-esteem resulting from membership in a colonized, pariah minority group that speaks a devalued language. Many Hispanic children enter the American school system as monolingual and/or monocultural, and perceive the schools as alien and hostile. They receive conflicting messages from home, school, and their peer group, and are unable to respond well to even the best teachers. Lack of writing skill is therefore not usually caused by interference from Spanish, as is usually thought, and writing problems cannot be remediated through the use of second-language teaching techniques. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED288356

ON THE WRITING OF BILINGUAL STUDENTS

Janet Castilleja

Two years ago, at Heritage College in Toppenish, another teacher and I discussed a student's writing problems. The other teacher said that the student's problems were probably caused by first language interference. While this student had a Spanish surname, she was actually of Native American descent. She spoke English with no discernible accent. She didn't speak Spanish or use Spanish words. In other words, there was no reason to assume that her first language was anything but English. Apparently, this teacher believed that any writing problems of a student with a Spanish surname must stem from interference from Spanish.

There is a tendency for educators to view bilinguals as second language learners and to assume that the problems that bilinguals have will be similar to the problems of second language learners. However, the word bilingual means "someone who already knows two languages." It doesn't mean "someone who is learning a new language." The writing problems of bilinguals may stem in part from their bilingualism (although I rather think not); they do not stem from attempts to learn a new language.

FL016995

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Castilleja

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

In practice, the term bilingual is used to describe individuals who vary widely in their language knowledge, from the person who speaks very good Spanish (in this paper, I will be referring to Spanish-English bilinguals unless otherwise stated) and is clearly uncomfortable in English to the person who is really much more at home in English. Many Spanish-English bilinguals in the U.S. have a very strong passive knowledge of Spanish but feel insecure about their ability to speak Spanish. Even more common is the person whose oral command of Spanish is good but who is essentially illiterate in Spanish.

A person who is able to use both languages equally well in any setting is called a balanced bilingual (Grosjean, 235). This term implies the ability to perform with the same level of comfort and competence in, for example, academic settings and social settings. This is very unusual, because in most societies in which two or more languages may be used, they are not used in the same settings (Fishman, 26-30, Grosjean, 112-166). In fact, Fishman points out that when two languages may be used in the same settings or domains, the use of two distinct languages will not last beyond three generations; if one language can be used in all domains, it will be. It is only when there is strict compartmentalization of domains that bilingualism or societal diglossia will be maintained.

In many societies in which bilingualism or diglossia exist one language serves as both the dominant language and the prestige language.This is true even when it is not the native language of the majority of the people of that society. The other language functions as the minority language. (I use the term minority language to refer to the status of the language, not the relative number of speakers of the language.) In these societies, the dominant, or prestige language, is the language used in formal settings. The prestige language is used for all official functions.

In addition, the prestige language is considered better than the minority language. The minority language is often thought to be ugly, deficient in vocabulary, inadequate for the expression of complex or abstract ideas, and generally barbaric. The prestige language is thought to be beautiful, rich in vocabulary and concepts, and expressive. In these settings, people will tend to believe that the minority language is inadequate for any but the most basic uses, and that the people who use the language are unable to think abstractly or to express complex ideas (Grosjean, 120-123). (In fact the attitude is very similar to that which Richard Rodriguez expresses in Hunger of Memory, in which he implies that Spanish is somehow childish and inadequate for the work of adults.) People are often embarrassed by use of the minority language, and would often rather be thought mute than to use the language in a formal setting. On the other

hand, use of the minority language can signal a conscious choice to use the language to show identification and solidarity with an ethnic or minority group (Penalosa, 192-193). There are settings in which the use of the minority language can be a form of protest and even defiance.

The decision to use one language or the other is heavily influenced by social and cultural factors. It is certainly not simply that one language is easier for the individual to use than the other. Language choice should be viewed, at least in part, as a conscious or unconscious sociopolitical statement (Ramirez, 1974).

In the United States today, Spanish has the status of a minority, and somewhat devalued, language. Spanish often seems to be viewed as little more than a vehicle for helping Spanish monolingual school children make the transition to English as quickly as possible. There is also a wide spread belief that the Spanish spoken in the U.S. is a debased, almost creolized dialect bearing little relationship to Iberian Spanish (Gardner in Penalosa, 188, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1974). This belief adds to the low regard in which most people hold Spanish.

The people who make these statements usually neglect to mention that Castilian Spanish contains many words and some grammatical forms borrowed from Basque, Arabic, Celtic, and German, as well as Catalan and Portuguese, the other two

major languages of Iberia. There are three major languages spoken in Spain, with Castilian (for a number of historical reasons) the major and official language of Spain. Castilian is also the language which was exported to the new world. It is proper to speak of the Spanish spoken by all Spanish-speaking inhabitants of the Americas as Castilian (in spite of the screams of Spanish teachers), since these people are not speaking one of the other major languages of Spain. Spanish Castilian and the varieties spoken in the Americas are all mutually intelligible (Penalosa, 17).Penalosa also points out that a wider variety of dialects exists within Spanish Castilian than among the Castilian varieties spoken in the Americas (17).

Much has been written about the effect that English, and living in the U.S., has had on the Spanish of Spanish-speakers in the U.S. The general consensus of writers living outside of the U.S., Spanish teachers in the U.S., and various other speakers of "pure Spanish" has been that U.S. Spanish hardly deserves to be called a language. Several writers and educators have stated that Mexican children have no real language since they speak neither English nor Spanish (U.S. Civil Rights Commission, 1974, Azar, 48). Those who acknowledge that the Spanish spoken in the U.S. is a language decry the lack of literacy of its speakers and the paucity of real thinking that it is used for.

Ever since I first heard these statements, they have bothered me. As time passed, I started to listen to the people around me who spoke Spanish. Specifically, I listened for evidence of simplification of the language which would indicate that a pidgin or creole was being spoken. I have never found any evidence of this, although it is true that there have been lexical and some phonological changes. Words and loan-translations from English are commonly heard in the Spanish spoken in the U.S.--but also in Latin-America--but when a word is borrowed from English, it is altered to conform to Spanish phonology, morphology and syntax. People tend to know and use the full range of verb conjugations. (There are ninety-six possibilities for each verb in Spanish.) People who learned Spanish in childhood but who do not know Spanish well (of whom there are many) generally lack vocabulary rather than grammatical features. They also tend to be nonliterate in Spanish, and so may lack a literary or academic register. (This is not always the case however. Probably the majority Spanish speaking people in the U.S. are at least somewhat literate in Spanish).

The more important aspect of Hispanics as language users is that most of the Spanish-speaking people I have known care about their language and want to use it correctly. Spanish tends to be somewhat more formal than English anyway, or at least there seem to be more occasions

for formality when using Spanish, and so it is very unusual to meet a person who speaks Spanish regularly who doesn't have control of both formal and informal registers. It would be very rare to meet someone who speaks only a slang variety of Spanish, as some have implied (Ornstein), although a lot of slang is used.

This low regard for U.S. Spanish has apparently been internalized by many Mexican-Americans. Ornstein (1974) found that fifty-one per cent of Anglos and thirty-one per cent of Chicanos considered Southwest Spanish to be no more than border slang. He also found that Mexican Spanish is considered by many Mexican-Americans to be better than the Spanish spoken in the Southwest; some of the Mexican Americans rated Iberian Castilian (a variety not spoken by people in the Americas) more highly than Southwest Spanish. Many of these people also believed that the English spoken in England is superior to the English spoken in in the U.S. Fortunately, Hispanics in the U.S. are a heterogenous group, and many have managed to retain their respect and love for the language.

There are several reasons for the low status of Spanish in the U.S. Perhaps the most important reason is that Spanish is the language of a conquered and colonized people. There were Spanish-speaking people in the U.S. for hundreds of years before there were English-speaking people. When the U.S. gained control of the Western and Southwestern

U.S., many Spanish-speaking people, of both European and Native-American descent, became residents of the U.S. whether they wanted to or not. They were mistreated as colonized people everywhere are mistreated.

Another reason for the low status of Spanish in the U.S. is the low status of speakers of Spanish in the U.S. Some of this low status is a result of lingering colonial attitudes. Some results from the generalized prejudices which many Anglos hold towards dark-skinned people. In addition, most Spanish-speakers in the U.S. are poor, badly educated, recent immigrants, refugees, and/or unemployed. None of these characteristics carries much status.

Spanish-English bilinguals in the U.S. must deal with a very strict division of the domains of language use. Spanish is the language of home and certain social settings. English is the language of "formal" settings, such as school, legal and official activities, and most business dealings. Religious activities may or may not take place in Spanish, depending on the denomination, location, etc. Because Spanish is the language of the home, and English is the language of school, many Hispanic children, when starting school, are faced with the contradictions and conflicts involved in being Spanish monolinguals in an English-speaking school system. Because of the stereotypes held by many people in the United States, even students who do not speak Spanish but are of Hispanic descent are assumed

to be bilingual and to have problems associated with bilingualism (Duran, 51-55). Although this in itself is not enough to cause school failure (children around the world routinely learn a new language when they start school or at adolescence ¡Grosjean¿), this frequently begins a long chain of events which leads to the low level of academic achievement commonly seen among Hispanics. It is very probable that it is the social problems associated with being bilingual and Hispanic in the U.S. that causes problems, not being bilingual.

One of the most damaging things which happens to children who enter school speaking Spanish, whether they are placed in bilingual, transitional, or regular classrooms, is the devaluation of the Spanish language, particularly the variety spoken in the U.S. (Penalosa, 187, Fishman, 188). Spanish becomes the language which is used only at home or while socializing. It is not the language which is used for education or business. Even in bilingual classrooms, people do not become truly literate in Spanish; they do not internalize the Spanish spelling system, for example, and are often taught very little content material in Spanish. Consequently, they learn to view Spanish as a sort of second class language (St. Clair, Guitart). For example, I have had students tell me that Spanish is not a good language for science. They tell me that Spanish is a good language for

telling stories but not for learning about computers. It is the language one uses at home, not in the real world.

The devaluation of the Spanish language does not occur just in school. Our society as a whole discourages the use of Spanish to the point where it can affect the entire life experience of bilinguals. It would be hoped that the contributions of linguistics to the teaching of English and ESL would help eradicate teachers' negative attitudes towards minority languages and dialects. This does not seem to be happening very quickly. I hear negative statements about American Spanish voiced by teachers regularly; it's very depressing. It is even more depressing to hear Hispanic children and young adults make negative statements about Spanish and about their own language skills.

For these reasons, among others, balanced bilinguals are very unusual. This does not actually mean that bilinguals are more competent in one language than the other. Rather, it means that they will use Spanish in some settings and English in others. The pressure to use one or the other of the languages is often, but certainly not always, subtle, and the division of domains of language use can result in the relative inability to switch domains. It can be difficult for many U.S. bilinguals to use Spanish in academic or official settings, even when it would be appropriate to do so.

This situation has led to one of the major problems in bilingual education: some, perhaps many, of the teachers, hired specifically because they are bilingual, are unable to use Spanish in an academic setting. Their students are then deprived of a role model in the competent use of Spanish in school. Until recently, it was not thought to be necessary to provide bilingual teachers with training in the academic use of Spanish, but this is now changing.

Further complicating the situation is the fact that a distinct dialect of English, which can be called Chicano English, exists wherever Hispanics of Mexican descent have lived for more than one generation (Wald, pp.16-17). Chicano English is a unique dialect of English in that the population which speaks this dialect always contains people who are bilingual in Spanish and English and people who are monolingual in English. This results in quite a bit of diversity within the dialect (Wald, 16-17). This dialect is frequently thought to be a poor, ungrammatical form of English (Penalosa, 184, Gonzalez, 35).

Chicano English is influenced by both Spanish and English. Forms which originally developed when Hispanics learned English have become standard features of the dialect and now may be used by people who can't speak Spanish at all. While Chicano English in some ways resembles the English of second-language learners of Hispanic origin, Chicano English noticeably lacks many of the features of the

language of recent learners of English. For example, when Spanish speakers learn English, they very frequently place a vowel sound, usually short 'e', before initial 's' consonant clusters, resulting in espend for spend and so on. This feature is not usually present in Chicano English (Wald, 21).

The phonology and intonation of Chicano English are the language features most likely to be perceived as different from Standard English. People whose families have been in the U.S. for generations and who may not even speak Spanish will often speak English with a noticeable accent. The accent will often be more or less pronounced depending on the environment and situation the speaker is in.

Also, there are distinct varieties of Chicano English. Spanish was the most common European language spoken in the Western U.S. until one hundred years ago. There are longstanding and relatively isolated Hispanic communities throughout the Southwest, especially in New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and parts of Texas and California. There are locales in the Southwest where people are commonly trilingual in Spanish, English, and an Indian language such as Yaqui or Navaho. Among the Pueblo Indians, many people have Spanish surnames due to the influence of Spanish in that area. These situations will tend to produce dialects of both Spanish and English which are very different from the dialect produced in Los Angeles, which has a constant influx

of speakers of both standard Spanish and standard English as well as speakers of nonstandard variants of both languages.

To make things more interesting, the English spoken by Puerto Ricans living in New York or Cubans living in Miami will differ both from each other and from that of the Mexicans in Los Angles. The Spanish spoken by Cubans, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans differ in phonology, vocabulary and idiom, and the English of these people is influenced by the characteristics of the English spoken in the three cities mentioned above. These varieties of English are not usually referred to as Chicano English. The term "Chicano" is generally reserved for people of Mexican ancestry.

For individuals who learned English simultaneously with Spanish, or in early childhood, nonstandard phonology in English probably indicates the use of Chicano English. Most of the students I see who have an accent could probably be classified as users of Chicano English rather than as second-language learners. It is important, I think, to make this distinction when diagnosing and remediating the writing of Hispanic individuals, since the two situations may require very different approaches.

Obviously, the differing situations covered by the term <u>bilingual</u> result in a variety of possibilities concerning the relative command of spoken and written English. It is my belief, though, that the majority of the students that I see now (I currently work for a federally

funded program which assists migrant and seasonal farmworkers to obtain a college education) and those whom I have taught in the past are people who speak Spanish quite well, but do not really read and write in Spanish (although they can usually learn to do so quite readily), and do not use Spanish academically. Their formal education, for better or for worse, has been in English. I would say that few if any of them have better language skills in Spanish than in English, if the ability to read and write is included in the definition of language skills, and so I don't think they could be considered balanced bilinguals.

To sum up, with the exception of recent immigrants to the U.S., most college age Hispanics are bilingual and/or bidialectal. They are not usually second language learners; frequently standard English is their strongest language or dialect. Although they often experience problems with written English, it seems very unlikely that these problems stem from interference from Spanish. It also seems unlikely that techniques used in the teaching of a second language would be particularly useful in teaching these students. Because of my own experiences with bilingual students, I have come to believe that the writing problems of bilingual students are the same sorts of problems which other basic writers face and should be remediated using techniques which might help any basic writer.

An example of the sort of problem which plagues basic writers, bilingual or not, is the deletion of the third person singular 's' on verbs. It is generally recognized that, in children and speakers of nonstandard dialects, this error is a result of overgeneralization (Shaughnessy, 95-97). Because English verbs are usually not inflected, the third person 's' must be learned as an exception after the general rules for inflecting verbs in the present, past, etc. have already been learned. It seems to be true that once a rule is internalized, individuals tend to apply that rule to all cases, regardless of the actual correctness. Exceptions frequently have to be consciously learned.

The third person verb forms are harder to learn than noun plurals, for example, even though (or because) on the surface they seem to be similar. The reason for this is that the noun plural 's' is very regular. There are relatively few exceptions to the rule that English plurals are formed by adding 's'. The exceptions which do exist result in a fair amount of confusion even for native English speakers. Since an 's' is added to a verb rather infrequently, it is a more difficult rule to learn than the rule for plurals.

Even though the difficulty of learning the rule for forming the third person singular is rather well-accepted (Shaughnessy, 1977), I still hear teachers complain that

bilingual students commit this error because of first language interference. This is an illogical assumption which I think illustrates the kind of errors people are prone to when dealing with bilinguals.

In order for an error to be a result of interference, there must be an analogous structure in the interfering language which the student is erroneously applying to the second language. This situation commonly results in syntax errors, particularly errors in word order. The individual will attempt to use English words with the word order of the first language.

The problem with calling the lack of use of the third person singular 's' an interference problem is that there is no analogous structure in Spanish. All finite verbs in Spanish are inflected. An 's' appears on the second person singular, the first person plural, and the second person plural (a rare form in New World Spanish). A Spanish-speaker normally expects all verbs to be inflected. When he learns English, he learns that English verbs are not usually inflected.

In this situation, one could assume that interference had occurred if the individual put an 's' on the second person singular verb in English. In the case of the third person 's', though, one would have to assume lack of complete knowledge of the English inflectional system. The person has learned the rule that English verbs are usually

not inflected and is overgeneralizing to include the third person singular. It is also possible that this error, in Spanish-speaking individuals, results from the reduction of word-final consonant clusters. Consonant clusters rarely occur in word final position in Spanish. The individual may simply not be hearing the 's' as a distinct phoneme in words like hints and thinks (Herrick). This doesn't explain the 's' deletion in words without word final consonant clusters. Also, many people who are not Spanish-speakers make this error. 'S' deletion seems to be a fairly common dialect feature in the U.S.; even in people who also speak Spanish, it could result from use of a nonstandard English dialect.

There are undoubtedly a number of reasons for the poor writing of Spanish-English bilinguals which are not connected to their bilingualism. However, one possibility which needs to be considered is that many Spanish-English bilnguals in the U.S. have no academic register in either language. These individuals tend to grow up in poor families, with parents who have little formal education. Many enter the U.S. school system monolingual in Spanish and have to spend a lot of time trying to catch up (although there is a fair amount of evidence that this in its self is not enough to explain school failure). Many are placed in migrant or ESL resource rooms, which often function as little more than holding tanks. Because of this, these children are not usually exposed to the kinds of instruction

and interaction with teachers which would result in their developing an adequate academic register in English.

It would seem that bilingual education would help this situation. Theoretically, if students were taught academic subjects in Spanish, they would develop an academic register in Spanish and perhaps be able to transfer this register to English. In practice, however, this seldom happens. Bilingual classrooms often function as places to dump children who would be in the way in regular classrooms. When they are not simply way stations, they are often used as transitional ESL classes rather than bilingual classrooms. The teachers use their time teaching survival English with very little time spent on academic subjects. Even when the teacher tries to use Spanish as the medium of instruction, the effort is often futile. One of the major problems is that the teachers hired to teach in bilingual classrooms have often been chosen simply because they speak Spanish, not because of any expertise in bilingual education. They may be people who have no academic register in Spanish themselves, and so cannot provide good role models for their students, much less use Spanish to teach in the content areas (Cabrera, 1978, Delgado-Contreras, 1985). Programs to train bilingual teachers will, I hope, begin to change this situation.

However, the problem is more serious than simply that Hispanic students are not prepared for the educational

settings they find themselves in. A number of recent articles support the hypothesis that Hispanic and other minority children receive less than optimal education even today. In spite of affirmative action, bilingual education, multicultural education and the lipservice paid to the needs of these children by the educational system, they are still being denied the opportunity for a meaningful education.

This seems to stem from the fact that people, educators, in this case, are unable to recognize either their own prejudices and preconceived notions or the effect that their own expectations and behaviors have on students. For example, Carmen Delgado-Contreras (Teachers' Expectations of Bilingual Children) reports on a study she did on the relationship between teachers' expectations and student achievement. Based on the observations of earlier researchers (Brophy and Good), she hypothesized that teacher expectations could be determined by observing the amount and type of attention students received from the teacher. She also hypothesized that children respond to teacher expectations by achieving at the level expected by the teacher.

Through teacher observation, she found that teachers' expectations for reading achievment were higher for children with stronger English skills. Children who spoke Spanish were not expected to achieve much, and the teachers behaved accordingly. Teachers initiated three times as many academic

activities with the high-expectation, English-speaking, group. Low-expectation, Spanish-speaking, children were given classroom chores and errands to do. Teachers (who were all bilingual in this study) spoke to the English speaking childen in English about school. Teachers spoke to the Spanish-speaking children in Spanish about non-academic matters.

Delgado-Contreras found that teacher expectations did differ for Spanish-speaking and English-speaking students, and that these expectations affected student performance. This study (unexpectedly, I think) pointed up one of major problems in bilingual education; many of the teachers do not have a background in the academic use of Spanish and cannot use it effectively as a medium for instruction.

Wayne Holtzman (The Influence of Sociocultural Factors on the Achievement and Placement of Limited English Proficient Hispanic Students) has published a bibliography of studies concerned with the effect that sociocultural factors have on both the achievement of Hispanic children and the placement of Hispanic children in special education classes. He was unable to find many articles dealing specifically with this issue; he therefore included articles on minority student placement, special education, etc.

The articles Holtzman cited strongly indicate that sociocultural factors affect both achievement and special

education placement. Interestingly, at least two studies indicated that language minority students, particularly Hipanics, suffer the most severe consequences in the public schools (Rosenthal,et.al., Steinberg, et.al.,). The majority of the articles indicated that racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic factors strongly influenced the placement of children in special education classrooms, with poor and minority children being much more likely to be so placed.

One of the studies (Hielsea and Fernandez, 1981) indicated that length of residence in the United States is negatively associated with school achievement. This corroborates my own observations, and I think is related to the behavior described by Labov (1972) and McDermott (1985). Students who have been in the United States all or most of their lives develop a strong identification with the minority youth subculture and, in the process of rejecting school with its strong association with the majority culture, learn a lot of really ineffective ways of dealing with school.

Teacher education courses are not entirely blameless in this process. I can remember being taught after I started graduate school that bilingual children actually have a smaller overall vocabulary than monolingual children. This statement was based on studies which have since been shown to be seriously flawed. Research to date is inconclusive on the cognitive effects of bilingualism

(Barik and Swain, 1976). In general, research done prior to 1960 (see Teresman, 1955, Kelley, 1936, MacNamra, 1966, etc.) usually found that bilingualism had a negative effect on the cognitive development of individuals. Since 1960, studies have tended to show that bilingualism has positive effects on cognitive development (see Peal and Lambert, 1962, etc.). All this research has been severely criticized, usually on the grounds that the groups being compared were not controlled for such factors as socioeconomic status, sex, age, or educational opportunities. The studies which resulted in negative outcomes tended to study groups of bilinguals from low socioeconimc backgrounds who were poor, badly educated and oftem immigrants. Studies which found positive results of bilingualism tended to study bilingual groups from higher socioeconomic backgrounds who were middle-class or better and well-educated, and who were bilingual in languages with high social value (Diebold, 44-47). Both groups tended to be compared to middle-class monolingual English speakers. It is generally thought that many of the differences, whether positive or negative, result from these factors (Grosjean, 221-227).

Many researchers have attempted to study the cognitive effects of bilingualism, but as a rule the researchers' biases are all too obvious. I recently read a research report (Mestre, 1986) which attempted to determine whether

or not being bilingual affected the individual's ability to think logically. Because Spanish grammatical constructions may correctly contain double negatives, this researcher hypothesized that Spanish-English bilinguals would tend to form English constructions which contain double negatives. He also hypothesized that these individuals would be unable to perceive the "true" meaning of double negatives in English.

People were asked to solve several logic problems containing sentences with double negatives. They were also asked to determine the actual meaning of the sentence "I don't want no money." The correct answer, which would show a grasp of logic, would be that the sentence means "I want some money." To maintain that the sentence indicates that no money is wanted would indicate both that the individual was experiencing interference from Spanish and that the individual was thinking illogically.

There are three major flaws in this research. The first is the assumption that the use of double negatives shows some sort of lack of ability to think logically. When I hear the sentence "I don't want no money," it is perfectly clear to me what the speaker means. Even though I know the English rules for double negative use, I am not tempted to believe that the speaker means he wants money. This kind of test on double negative use is not a good indicator of the lack of ability to think logically since the use of double

negatives is so common and so commonly understood in the U.S. (Not to mention the fact that it is just the sort of thing which makes English teachers and education researchers so insufferable.)

The second flaw is the assumption that the use of double negatives is a good indicator of interference from Spanish. The use of double negatives is such a common (and minor) variation on standard English that it seems very unwise to conclude anything from this other than that the speaker uses double negatives. In addition, just because the person being tested understands what is meant by a sentence with a double negative doesn't necessarily mean the person uses this type of construction or that it affects the way he thinks.

The worst problem with this research, though, is in the sample used. The researcher compared seventy-three Anglo college students to sixty Hispanic students from various backgrounds. He gives the students' test scores on a number of tests including the SAT. It is immediately clear, and he states this, that the Hispanic students are seriously underprepared for college in comparison to the Anglo students. Yet, the author does not acknowledge that this in itself could account for the Hispanics' poor showing on the various tests he gives them. Also, this indicates to me that the samples were not well-controlled; I wonder whether

any comparisons between the two groups, other than that the Hispanics came to college underprepared, would be valid.

The use of unsubstantiated research on the cognitive effects of bilingualism in a teacher education class illustrates a serious problem in teacher education: the disturbing tendency to adopt theories and practices which are not proven and may have very little theoretical validity. I think it would be reasonable to assume that some of the people who were in the course mentioned above are now teachers who think that bilingual individuals have limited vocabularies and who have low expectations of their Hispanic and bilingual students. I believe that this is a serious problem for Hispanic students at all levels because so many teachers have erroneous beliefs about-- and low expectations of-- bilingual students.

This is not to state that student behaviors have no effect on their achievement in school; they do. I have had teachers tell me that my students behave as though simply showing up is enough, that they have the attitude that doing the assignment, no matter how badly, should result in at least a passing grade. This, of course, gets them into all kinds of difficulties with their teachers. I believe this stems from, among other causes, their general unfamiliarity with the demands of college classes. Many of these students have been badly misled by their previous school experiences. Many of them were migrant childen who spent some or all of

the year in migrant resource rooms, or in reading or language resource rooms. Typically, children come out of these settings with very little in the way of education. In addition, they are given passing grades and promoted regardless of the quality of the work they do. They are given the impression that the quality of their work doesn't matter as long as they do something.

They are also sadly misinformed about the level of effort required to do quality work. My students are horrified to learn that college teachers expect them to do two hours of work per night per class. The kind of sustained, intense effort required to write a really good paper is unknown to many of them, at least in the academic setting.

It isn't just a matter of not wanting to make the effort. Most of them desperately want to succeed. But, their lack of academic preparation combined with their lack of familiarity with academic processes and procedures means that they would have to put out an almost superhuman effort to achieve at the same level as students coming into college from a more traditional background. Essentially, these students are faced with two major learning tasks. 1) They must learn to understand and accept the academic and social demands of college, and 2) they must raise their academic skills to the point where they can compete with other college students.

For my students, this has turned out to be very nearly crippling, especially since they are almost never consciously aware of just how counterproductive their behavior is. From my observations, these behaviors include inattention in class, avoidance of teachers, classes, and educational settings, inability to concentrate while engaged in educational activities, inappropriate behavior when in the presence of teachers, occasional acting-out in class, and inability to ask questions and follow up on the need for more information. They exhibit much anxiety over tests, papers, and projects, and find it very difficult to profit from criticisms offered by their teachers, and they exhibit severe and almost overwhelming anxiety when confronted with the educational system in any guise. Given these behaviors, their lack of achievement is not surprising.

Of course, I have students who show few or none of these behaviors, but not very many. My students sit in my office, pale, their hands shaking, when we discuss their classes. They cry, they show signs of depression (excessive sleep, lethargy, lack of affect, lack of appetite), and they usually seem to be fighting the desire to break and run. It's hard to describe how disturbing as well as disheartening this is for me, and it has given me a great deal of respect for the power that teacher expectations can have over the achievement of children, as well as adult students, and for the ways in which teacher and student

behaviors can interact to produce a negative educational outcome, as they say.

To many of us who came from more traditional backgrounds, who always knew we would go to college, and who may have had parents who attended college, college, especially undergraduate courses, does not seem that hard. It can be very difficult to understand how it can be so hard for some students when the material seems so easy to us. I think it is necessary to view this in terms of cognitive development.

It has been theorized that a person's ability to operate at higher cognitive levels in particular subject areas increases according to the kind and amount of practice and instruction he or she has received in that area. According to this line of reasoning, the entire concept of a person operating at one cognitive level in all activities is false. Rather, he or she operates at higher cognitive levels as familiarity with the task or subject matter increases (Phipps, 1984). For example, if a person were given constant exposure to and practice with a foreign language from a very young age, he or she would probably be very proficient in that language, in addition to the native language. In fact, this person would probably find it difficult to understand why other people have so much trouble with it.

In the same way, if a child is exposed to good schools and effective instruction in which the teachers have reasonable but demanding expectations of him, he will become very good at dealing with this setting. Even a child who is not exceptionally intelligent will have little trouble learning the skills necessary to this setting and carrying them to college with him. On the other hand, if a child is sent to a school taught in a foreign language, where the teachers clearly do not know what to do with him, where his language and culture are devalued by both teachers and children, and if he is moved from school to school, often missing many days of school each year, it is unlikely that he will ever be really comfortable in this setting. It is also highly likely that he will identify with his family and culture to the exclusion of school and the culture it represents. Even if he realizes the need for a better education, he is not going to be equipped to get it. The result is that Hispanics are severely underrepresented in higher education. Only 34 per cent of Mexican-Americans are high school graduates; only 4.3 per cent have completed four years of college (Wagenheim, 55). About half of those Hispanics who enroll in college dropout before finishing.

This paper started out as an attempt to show that the writing problems of most bilingual students does not stem from their bilinguilism <u>per se</u>. Many, if not most, English teachers would say that bilingual writers tend to have many

problems. If these problems are not related to their bilingualism, then what are the causes?

I think that many of the problems which plague bilingual writers are the same as those which affect other basic writers. The most serious problem is unfamiliarity with written, academic English. Most basic writer have not been optimally educated; even if they have completed twelve years of elementary and secondary education, they have not done enough reading and writing to be really competent in these skills.

It is the rare student who can overcome this type of deficit on his own. Most need intensive remedial and developmental education in order to be adequately prepared for college work.

Hispanic students share some problems with other poor, minority, nonmainstream students. These students tend to identify with their own subcultures and with the subculture of poverty stricken youth in the U.S. These subcultures do not value traditional educational goals; these students will tend not to have knowledge and behaviours which will help them do well in college.

I think these problems are exacerbated by their status as members of a colonized, pariah minority group and speakers of a devalued language. There is some evidence that Hispanics tend to suffer from low self-esteem and other psychological problems related to their status in society.

These problems tend to interfere with their overall level of functioning in the mainstream society as well as their academic performance. Perhaps more importantly, though, their societal status and the general impression which people seem to hold regarding Hispanics has created a situation in which teachers do not expect high achievement from Hispanic students. The effect which teacher expectations can have on student achievement has been well-documented (Duran, 46-50).

Worsening the situation is the fact that many Hispanic children enter the U.S. school system as monolingual in Spanish and/or monocultural in the Hispanic or Hispanic-American culture. Bilingual, ESL and transitional classrooms in the U.S. are far from perfect; many, perhaps most, Hispanic children perceive school as alien and somewhat hostile. They are also receiving what seem to be conflicting messages from home, school and their peer group. They are generally in no condition to respond well to the efforts of their teachers, no matter how well-intentioned and skilled.

A process is set in motion which leads to increasingly poor performance on the part of Hispanic children in U.S. schools. Several studies indicate that the gap between the performance of mainstream students and Hispanics grows wider as they move up through the grades (Rosenthal, et al, 92-97, Duran, 13-17). By the time they are in high school, the

average Hispanic student is performing two or more grade levels below the average Anglo student in reading (Duran, 36-41). This poor performance affects all aspects of their academic performance. Given the differential between the performance of Hispanic students and Anglo students, it would be very surprising if many Hispanics came into college as skilled writers. I hope I have shown, though, that their lack of skill as writers is not usually caused by interference from Spanish and that their problems cannot be remediated through the use of second-language teaching techniques.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baker, Keith A., and Adriana A. de Kanter, eds. Bilingual Education: A Reappraisal of Federal Policy. Lexington, MA.: D.C. Heath and Co., 1983.

Barik, H., and M. Swain. "A Longitudinal Study of Bilingual and Cognitive Development." International Journal of Psychology. 11 (1976): 251-263.

Baugh, John. "Chicano English: The Anguish of Definition." Ornstein-Galicia 1-13.

Baugh, John and Joel Sherzer. Language in Use: Readings in Sociolinguistics. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1984.

Ben-Zeev, S. "The Influence of Bilingualism on Cognitive Strategy and Cognitive Development." Child Development. 48 (1977): 1009-1018.

Cabrera, Arturo Y., ed. Strategies for Education of Chicanos. Niwot, Co.: Sierra Publications, 1978.

Delgado-Contreras, Carmen. "Teachers' Expectations of Bilingual Children's Achievment." Annual Meeting of American Ed. Research Association, Chicago, 31 March-4 April 1985. ERIC ED 266 117.

Duran, Richard. Hispanics' Education and Background: Predictors of College Achievement. New York: The College Board, 1983.

Edelsky, Carole. Writing in a Bilingual Program: Habia una Vez. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Pub. Co., 1986.

Edwards, A.D. Language in Culture and Class: The Sociology of Language and Education. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1976.

Fishman, Joshua and Gary Keller, eds. Bilingual Education for Hispanic Students in the United States. New York: Teachers College Press, 1982.

Fishman, Joshua. "Bilingualism and Biculturalism as Individual and as Societal Phenomena." Fishman, 23-26.

Grosjean, Francois. Life with Two Languages: An Introduction to Bilingualism. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982.

Guitart, Jorge M. "The Question of Language Loyalty." Social and Educational Issues in Bilingual and Bicultural Education. St. Clair, et al. find page number

Holtzman, Wayne H, Jr. The Influence of Sociocultural Factors on the Achievement and Placement of Limited English Proficient Hispanic Students. ERIC, 1985. ED 261 485.

Jacobson, Rodolfo. "Uncovering the Covert Bilingual: How to Retrieve the Hidden Home Language." In Advances in Bilingual Education Research. Eds. Eugene Garcia and Raymond Padilla. Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1985. ED 266 909

Kelley, V. "Reading Abilities of Spanish and English Speaking Pupils." Journal of Educational Reasearch 29 (1936): 209-211.

Labov, William. Language in the Inner City. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1972, pp. 241- 292.

MacNamara, J. Bilingualism and Primary Education Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1966.

McLaughlin, Barry. Second-Language Acquisition in Childhood: Vol.1 Preschool Children. 2nd ed. Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, Assoc., 1984.

Mestre, Jose P. "The Latino Science and Englineering Student." Olivas, 157-192.

Nash, Rose. Comparing English and Spanish: Patterns in Phonology and Orthography. New York: Regents Pub. Co., 1977.

Nielson, Francois. "Hispanics in High School and Beyond." Olivas, 71-103.

Ogbu, John. Minority Education and Caste: The American System in Cross-cultural Perspective. New York: Academic Press, 1978.

Olivas, Michael A., ed. Latino College Students. New York: Teachers College Press, 1986.

Ornstein-Galicia, Jacob. Form and Function in Chicano English. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1981.

Ortiz, Vilma. "Generational Status, Family Background, and Educational Attainment among Hispanic Youth and Non-Hispanic White Youth." Olivas, 29-46.

Peal, E. and W. Lambert. "The relationship of Bilingualism to Intelligence." Psychological Monographs. 76 (1962) : Whole Number 546.

Penalosa, Fernando. Chicano sociolinguistics. Rowley, MA.: Newbury House Pub., 1980.

Rizzo, Betty and Santiago Villafane. "Spanish Influence on Written English." Error 1.1 (1975) 62-71.

St. Clair, Robert. "Language and Political Socialization in a Bicultural Society." St. Clair, et al, pp 63- 73.

St. Clair, Robert, Guadelupe Valdes and Jacob Ornstein-Galicia. Social and Educational Issues in Bilingualism. Washington,D.C.: University Press of America, 1981.

St. Clair, Robert, Gaudelupe Valdes, and Jacob Ornstein-Galicia. "On Defining Social and Educational Issues In Bilingual and Bicultural Education: Introductory Essay. St. Clair, et al, pp. 1-22.

Santiago Santiago, Isaura. "The Education of Hispanics In the United States: Inadequacies of the American Melting-pot Theory." Education and the Integration of Ethnic Minorities. Eds. Dietmar Rothermund and John Simon. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986

Shaunessy, Mina. Errors and Expectations. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977.

Stazcek, John J. "Expanded Subcategorization of Spanish-English Bilingual Spelling Strategies." Fishman and Keller, 139-150.

Tireman, L. "Bilingual Child and his Reading Vocabulary." Elementary English. 32 (1955): 33-35.

Trueba, Henry T., and Carol Barnett-Mizrahi, eds. Bilingual Multicultural Education and the Professional. Rowley, MA.: Newbury House Pub, Inc., 1979.

Turner, Paul, ed. Bilingualism in the Southwest. 2nd ed. Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1982.

Valdes, Guadelupe, Anthony Lopez, and Rodolfo Garcia-Moya. Teaching spanish to the Hispanic Bilingual: Issues, Aims, and Methods. New York, Teachers college Press, 1981.

von Maltitz, Frances W. Living and Learning in Two Languages: Bilingual-Bicultural Education in the

United States. New York: McGraw-Hill. 1975.

Wald, Benji. "The Status of Chicano English as a Dialect of American English." Ornstein-Galicia 3-13.

Wagenheim, Kal. "The Hispanic Phenomenon." Hispanics and Grantmakers: A Special Report of Foundation News. Ed. Henry Santaestevan. Washington: Council on Foundations, 1981. ERIC 264 055.